



### **What is rotavirus?**

Rotavirus is a virus that is one of the most common causes of diarrhea and vomiting.

### **Who is at risk for rotavirus?**

People of all ages are at risk for rotavirus, but it is most common among children younger than age 2. Almost all children have been infected by the time they are age 3.

### **What are the symptoms of rotavirus?**

Symptoms include non-bloody, watery diarrhea, nausea, vomiting and dehydration in severe cases. Fever and abdominal pain occur frequently and generally last four to six days.

### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms usually appear two to four days from the time of infection.

### **How is rotavirus spread?**

It is spread through fecally contaminated food, hands or surfaces touched by objects or hands put into the mouth (fecal-oral route). Rotavirus can be found on toys, hard surfaces, water or food, and it is often spread within families.

### **When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?**

Virus is present before diarrhea begins and can be shed in the stool. On average, symptoms last four to six days, although shedding of virus can last up to 30 days in people who have compromised immune systems.

### **How is a person diagnosed?**

Diagnosis can usually be made by a laboratory test of stool specimens.

### **What is the treatment?**

There is no treatment for rotavirus. Most people with rotavirus will recover on their own. Fluids can be given to prevent and correct dehydration.

### **Does past infection make a person immune?**

No, a person can get infected more than once because the virus has many types.

### **Should children or others be excluded from day care, school, work or other activities if they have rotavirus?**

Yes, if the child has:

- Vomited two or more times within the previous 24 hours, unless the vomiting is determined to be caused by a noninfectious condition and the child is not in danger of dehydration.
- A fever or is unable to participate and the staff determines that they cannot care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group.

Exclude infected staff or people who handle food for as long as they are symptomatic.

**What can be done to prevent the spread of rotavirus disease?**

- Children should get three doses of rotavirus vaccine at 2, 4 and 6 months of age. The first dose should be given between 6 and 12 weeks of age. Children should have received all three doses by 32 weeks of ages.
- Hand washing is the most important prevention method. This should be done especially after toileting or diapering and before any contact with food or surfaces involved in preparation and serving food.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness by using a bleach-based household cleaner.

**Additional Information:**

For additional information, call the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

Resources: American Academy of Pediatrics. [Rotavirus]. In: Pickering LK, ed. Red Book: 2003 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases. 26th ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2003:[123-127, 534-536].  
Control of Communicable Disease Manual, 18th Edition-2004, Heymann, David, MD ed.

